

Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of October, Two Thousand and Twenty One

Temperature

Average minimum: 16.5°C 61.79°F
Average maximum: 39.0°C 81.53°F
Minimum recorded: 11.0°C 51.80°F
Maximum recorded: 39.0°C 102.20°F

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 50.7 mm
For the season to date: 56.7 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:20
Sunset: 18:00

Whispering winds whirl through the dry grasslands, weaving gracefully amongst creatures great and small. A thirst for the summer delights is pinnacle and the tempting smell of rain is in the air. A glorious month of change in the bushveld, with our first rains injecting life into the earth. Elephant numbers have been exponential and cat sightings just as exciting. As we embrace the change of seasons, we look forward to the new life that summer brings.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for October:

Lions

- The Mhangene pride have been seen occasionally. The two youngsters are looking good and doing well. One of the Mhangene females has been spending a lot of time with the Nkuhuma male. They're been seen mating throughout this month.
- The Nkuhuma pride have been sighted south-east of our property, which is very exciting as it's the furthest south we've seen them.

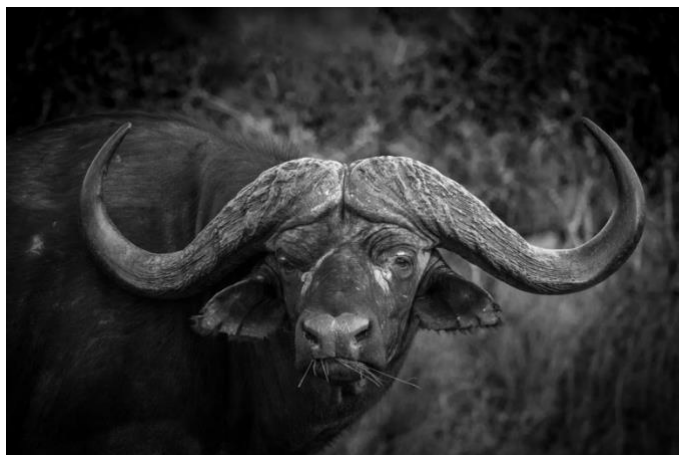


Elephants

- To say we've seen a lot of elephants this month is an understatement. With a record number of over 170 sightings, almost every drive has been filled with these beautiful giants.
- Many bulls roam the lands from the Sand River, all the way south towards our grassland planes. One particular herd of elephants that's been seen regularly includes a tiny newborn calf. They've spent a lot of time in front of Boulders Lodge and along the Sand River.

Leopards

- The Kangela male and his mother, the Scotia female continue to delight us with exciting and eventful sightings.
- The Misava male has been seen a number of times this month.
- The Hosana male leopard and Nkuwa female leopard have been seen mating and were chased up a tree by the Tsalala lionesses. These lionesses continue to remain around the Sand River.
- The Nyeleti male has been seen less but maybe because the Thamba male has been frequenting his area.
- The Thamba male leopard is still expanding his territory and we've had many sightings of him this month. One sighting we found him fighting off a clan of four hyenas who were trying to steal his juvenile wildebeest kill.



Buffalo

- Massive herds move through the property, from the cool waters of the river, to Castleton Dam and the north. One particularly large herd is estimated around 700 individuals!

Cheetahs

- We are delighted to find cheetahs on our property. This month, we've seen a male cheetah a few times and well as a female with two cubs!

Bird List

The bird list for October includes three new bird species, the yellow-billed stork, thick-billed cuckoo and square-tailed nightjar. This brings our yearly total to 287.

Some bush reflections and articles follow, as well as the October Gallery of images.

African wild dogs or painted wolves as they are also known, have often been viewed as controversial hunters. Functioning in a pack, the cursorial dog's technique is to exhaust their prey by chasing it over a long distance, vocalizing to one another and eventually bringing down their prey before swiftly disembowelling it for consumption.

We got to witness this event take place one afternoon when we set out to search the southwestern sections of Singita Sabi Sand. Our goal for the afternoon was to find the Othawa pack of African wild dogs who were seen in the area that morning. We arrived in their last known location which was just west of a prominent dam in the southwestern grasslands only to find that they had moved and were no longer there. We spent the entire afternoon tracking without any luck and we eventually had to call the search off due to the fading light.

Being a fair distance away from the lodge we decided we would start making our way back to the lodge when all of a sudden, an impala ram came 'flying' passed the front of our vehicle. We stopped and looked back in the direction from where the impala had come and saw the characteristic figures of 12 African wild dogs hurtling after the impala who had now launched itself into the middle of the previously mentioned dam.

Darkness had fallen and we would typically then leave any and all wild dog sightings as we do not view these animals at night but it just so happened to be full moon on this evening and so we had ample light to view what would transpire without the use of any spotlights.

The impala had moved to a shallow part in the middle of the dam where it settled with the hopes of the pack moving off. We watched for the next 30 minutes as the pack continued to circle the dam, with each individual taking a turn to venture in but never too far in to trouble the impala. The excitement of the pack had drawn the attention of two spotted hyenas who had moved into the area and were now waiting a couple metres away from the dam. Eventually, one pack member through what was most likely too much excitement swam in and across to the impala where it then grabbed hold of the very distressed animal and started dragging it back to the eastern side of the dam. The rest of the pack were now all waiting, jumping, vocalizing and wading in to help pull the animal out of the water.

On cue, as soon as the impala was out of the water, the two hyenas that were patiently waiting had now muscled their way in and began fighting off the pack members. The sounds were incredible, almost indescribable, the shrieks and cackles from the hyenas and the high-pitched chatters from the wild dogs were echoing through the evening air and soon more hyenas showed up, pushing the entire pack of wild dogs off the kill.

The sounds, however, had attracted the attentions of a rival clan of hyenas who appeared out of the shadows in numbers and we were now witnessing two clans fighting each other for the remains of the impala!

The two clans became so focused on fighting each other and trying to drive each out of whichever territory they were in that they forgot about the carcass altogether which the pack of dogs then simply grabbed and ran off with.

A triumph for the pack and an absolutely insane sighting overall which had left everyone in the vehicle, including myself, speechless. We made our way back to the lodge after what had felt like an eternity to reminisce over what had become one of my most memorable sightings ever.

Three little owls

Article by Marc Bowes-Taylor

This month I thought I would shed some light on the three smallest owl species we find at Singita Sabi Sand. I will go through some of the similarities as well as how to differentiate between these three species. The species we will look at are the African scops owl, the African barred owlet and pearl-spotted owl.



The smallest owl in Africa, the African scops owl, is one that is often heard but rarely seen due to their nocturnal habits and incredible camouflage. Easily identified by its diminutive size, yellow eyes and grey colouration.

The African barred owlet is probably the one that is least heard out of the three species mentioned. This owlet can be identified by the barring on the chest compared to the streaked chest of the pearl-spotted owl. This owl is slightly bigger by just one inch than the pearl-spotted owl.

The pearl-spotted owl, is a great bird to listen out for as the pair sings in duet with one another, usually at dusk and dawn. Their unmistakable call stays in the memory of even



the most novice birder. The “false eyes” on the back of the head, and streaked chest, are diagnostic for this species.

These three owls occupy a niche in the environment where they hunt small prey ranging from insects, lizards, birds and occasionally rodents. The minute size makes them efficient at hunting their prey normally from a perch where the swoop down on their unsuspecting victim. Another similarity is that they all nest in holes in tree cavities, normally made by woodpeckers. These holes are so important in protecting vulnerable chicks.



Owls are often overlooked on safari as they can be difficult to find. Paying attention to the alarm calls of birds are a great way of finding them.



Crossing the Sand River to explore the north, I stumbled upon a surprising scene. A southern yellow-billed hornbill was sitting on the sandy road with what appeared to be a small bird in its beak. On closer inspection, the hornbill's prey looked like one of the more common species of 'little brown jobs', known as a rattling cisticola.

Its prey, already lifeless, was gripped by the head and beaten against the ground as the hornbill tried to soften and open it up. Undisturbed by our presence and allowing me to photograph its behaviour for at

least fifteen minutes, the hornbill was making no progress and decided to fly off to a nearby tree for better luck.

In the tree its luck also didn't change after smashing the cisticola against a branch for a couple of minutes. In the end it dropped its prey and flew off to try and find something less energy consuming!



Typically, yellow-billed hornbills feed predominantly on small invertebrates like flying insects and vertebrates like nestlings, rodents, snakes, chameleons, frogs, and bird's eggs. Fruits and seeds are also included in their diets. Hunting is mostly done on the ground by running and hopping around searching for prey. If prey isn't located this way, they will glean prey from vegetation, hawk prey from a perch, and dig or open under dung and bark.



October Gallery



Cape vultures.

Photographed by Paul Josop



A cheetah claims Castleton as its territory.

Photographed by Gareth Poole



White rhino and hippo.

Photographed by Gareth Poole



Thamba male leopard, photographed by Gareth Poole



Nyeleti male leopard.

Photographed by Gareth Poole



Elephant tender moments.
Photographed by Nick du-Plessis



Cheetah cubs on the catwalk... Photographed by Nick du-Plessis